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C O N F I D E N T I A L TBILISI 002254

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/21/2019
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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: IRI POLL SHOWS UGULAVA AS FRONT RUNNER
FOR MAYOR

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Kent Logsdon for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary/Comment: A recent International Republican Institute (IRI) poll of Tbilisi residents showed likely United National Movement (UNM) candidate and current mayor Gigi Ugulava with a significant lead on the field of probable Tbilisi mayoral candidates in upcoming local elections scheduled for May, 2010. Likewise, UNM maintains a substantial lead in popularity in the race for Tbilisi local council elections. President Saakashvili also enjoys a very strong favorability rating in opposition-leaning Tbilisi. Irakli Alasania and the Alliance for Georgia polled a distant second in both the race for mayor and city council which indicates that Alasania has significant work to do to turn his positive favorability into electoral support. Nonetheless, Ugulava's numbers do not make him unassailable. With a number of opposition parties vowing to sit out the race, Alasania could still capture enough of the opposition electorate to challenge Ugulava, although current numbers indicate he has a lot of work to do. IRI releases polling results to the Government and opposition parties; however, with regard to favorability ratings for parties and candidates, IRI shares only the result for the individual party being briefed. End Summary/Comment.

The Poll

¶2. (C) IRI conducted an opinion poll from November 25 - December 3 which interviewed 800 Tbilisi residents 18 years and older who are currently registered to vote in Tbilisi. Most notable, apart from the ballot test and favorability ratings of various politicians, was the apparent apathy of those polled. For example, when asked to name a specific failure of Mayor Gigi Ugulava during his tenure as mayor, 70 percent of those polled were unable to generate a response. Confirming a lack of grass roots political participation in the absence of elections, 90 percent of those polled say they have not participated in a municipal meeting of any kind. When asked hypothetically why one would approach the local government for help, 60 percent responded "do not know". However, respondents generally felt that the government was not doing its part in actively communicating what it was doing to the public. Of those who did feel sufficiently informed of what the government was doing or had accomplished, 83 percent learned about its activities through television. The findings suggest that the communication gap between the Tbilisi government and its residents is a two-way street.

United National Movement the Party of Choice

¶3. (C) UNM continues to be the most popular party with 29 percent of respondents choosing it as their choice for city council if elections were held immediately. Alliance for Georgia came in second with 13 percent, followed by the Labor Party with 9 percent, National Forum with 8 percent, and the

Christian Democratic Movement (CDM) with 6 percent. Notably, 28 percent responded to the question as to their choice for city council with "none" or "did not know." Alliance for Georgia Leader, Irakli Alasania was the most popular political figure (63 percent favorable - 30 unfavorable) followed by Ugulava (62 - 31), former Ombudsman (and current member of Alasania's party Our Georgia - Free Democrats) Sozar Subari (60 - 31), President Saakashvili (60 - 34), co-National Forum leader Gubaz Sanikidze (50 - 38), and CDM leader Giorgi Targamadze (48 - 43). The only other leader Qleader Giorgi Targamadze (48 - 43). The only other leader with a positive favorability rating in Tbilisi was co-National Forum leader Kahka Shartava (47-37). Other notables included New Rights Leader (and Alliance for Georgia member) David Gamkrelidze (40 - 51), Labor Leader Shalva Natelashvili (40 - 52), Republican Leader (and Alliance for Georgia member) David Usupashvili (38 - 49), Levan Gachechiladze (35 - 56), Georgia's Way leader Salome Zourabishvili (26 - 65), and Democratic Movement - United Georgia leader Nino Burjanadze (17 - 75).

Mayoral Election - Ugulava Popular, Economy the Issue

14. (C) Residents continue to view unemployment (60 percent first mention, 75 percent all mentions when asked to name the three most important issues facing Tbilisi) and the general state of the economy (8 percent, 21 percent) as the most pressing issues facing Tbilisi. Social problems, a feeling of instability, the price of goods and medical services rounded out the respondents' top concerns. Nevertheless, a slight majority felt the city is headed in the right direction. The major issues Tbilisi residents thought the mayor needed to address were creating jobs and solving social problems, followed by improving the appearance of the city.

Respondents listed the improved appearance of the city as the biggest accomplishment of Mayor Gigi Ugulava's term. Overall, the results reveal support for Ugulava's election in the upcoming mayoral race. Respondents chose Ugulava as the favorite if the mayoral election were held tomorrow. Ugulava received 35 percent, Alasania came in second at 14 percent, Sanikidze followed at 9 percent, trailed by Gogi Topadze (Industrialists) and Gachechiladze who both received 4 percent. Already announced non-parliamentary opposition candidates Zviad Dzidziguri (Conservatives) and Koba Davitashvili (People's Party) both polled at 3 percent with 13 percent responding either "none" or "do not know."

Television Dominates Information Exchange

15. (C) Tbilisi residents are heavily dependent upon TV to deliver political information (94 percent name it as a source of political information) followed distantly by newspapers (19 percent), relatives and friends (13 percent), radio (9 percent), internet (8 percent) and magazines (7 percent). When asked to list a newspaper they read, 71 percent of those polled could not name one. Radio fared even worse with 81 percent of those polled responding that they could name a radio station they use as a source of political information. Rustavi 2 and Imedi continue to be the dominant and most trusted news sources within the country. Rustavi 2 was named as the most regularly viewed (84 percent), followed by Imedi (80 percent), Channel 1 (33 percent), Kavkasia (32 percent), and Maestro (17 percent). Rustavi 2 was listed as the most trusted (35 percent first mention, 62 percent all mentions), with Imedi (22 percent first, 61 percent all), Kavkasia (16 percent first, 24 percent all), Channel 1 (3 percent first, 18 percent all) and Maestro (3 percent first, 10 percent all) following. Of those surveyed, 15 percent trusted no news source and 5 percent did not know. When asked if Georgian media is free to express varying political views, 41 percent felt that mass media was either not very free or not free at all, while 52 percent thought the media was either totally free or somewhat free with 7 percent responding that they did not know.

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